



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

ICE AGENTS RETURN \$5,000 TO BUFFALO AREA SCAM VICTIM *Agents Warn of Telemarketing Con Artists Targeting the Elderly*

ROCHESTER, N.Y. -- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents have returned \$5,000 to a Fairport man, money that was taken from him by telemarketing con artists operating from Canada. The resident fell victim to a common scam in which the criminals tell the targets they have won a lottery and must pay a "customs duty," in order to collect the winnings. Agents report that the con artists often pose as government officials in order to convince their victims to send money.

The money was returned to the victim following an investigation by a multi-agency joint U.S.-Canada initiative called Project COLT. In this case, the caller represented himself as a customs representative who was collecting the duty. ICE Agents warn that people should immediately check with the appropriate federal agency if a caller purports to be a representative of the government.

Project COLT was formed in the 1990s to combat telemarketing fraud in both countries. Project COLT includes the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, ICE, the FBI and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, among other law enforcement and government agencies.

Peter J. Smith, Buffalo ICE Special Agent warned that people should be vigilant for such schemes. Project COLT estimates that these criminals have bilked many people in the United States, especially the elderly, out of tens of millions of dollars.

Smith said, "New York residents should not be fooled by con artists who pass themselves off as trustworthy individuals interested in helping them make or recover money. These are professionals skilled at bilking every dollar possible from their victims."

Before sending a single cent to a telemarketer people should call the toll-free Project COLT hotline at: 888-495-8501.

"ICE will do everything it can to stop this criminal enterprise, but the first line of defense is for people to be very suspicious of anyone telling them to send money," Smith stated

Fraudulent telemarketers represent themselves to victims as lawyers, government officials, police officers, accountants or lottery company officials. The victims are told that they will receive a sum of money varying from thousands to millions of dollars in lottery winnings. The targets of these schemes lose their entire life savings.

Since 1998, the joint initiative has included agents from the following organizations: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), FBI, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), S-ret, du Quebec (Quebec Provincial Police), Montreal City Police Department, Canada Post, and Competition Bureau. The focus of Project COLT is to identify, disrupt, and dismantle telemarketing fraud operations.

Project COLT is a unit consisting of law enforcement officers who intercept funds (usually bank drafts and cashiers' checks), so they can be recovered and ultimately returned to victims.

Project COLT Officers also work to prevent further victimization both through public education and the prosecution of those who commit the fraud. Project COLT members also have formed partnerships with Canada Customs and Revenue, Canada Post Corporation, Federal Express, Purolator, United Parcel Service, DHL and other companies to assist with fund interception and return.

Project COLT online: http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/qc/pro_ser/delits_e.htm

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.